

*Dumping at Sea*

The bill could have been much stronger if, first of all, the government had used the opportunity that the bill presented to meet Canadian dumping problems which are not met or addressed by the international convention. I think particularly of the matter raised by my colleague the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) in regard to the very serious problem of small coastal communities on both coasts of Canada that make a practice of dumping by barge and who will be affected by the provisions of the bill.

We were given verbal assurances that this question was in hand, that there had been discussions between the federal and provincial authorities in regard thereto; but it is clear that the government should have brought some action into play that would bring relief to these communities, some guarantee that they would not be victimized by this law, and so that the provincial governments concerned could have acted to help protect those communities. That is one instance where the bill could have been improved. Another is with regard to making more stringent the regulations regarding Canadian ships operating in Canadian waters. These would augment the provisions that are already part of the international convention.

Another way the bill could have been made much stronger would have been for the government to accept amendments regarding public participation and the public's right of appeal. It is not only the polluters and the bureaucrats who have an interest in environmental questions, Mr. Speaker; this is a matter that is of vital concern to all Canadians, particularly the growing number of Canadians who are anxious to preserve the environment of Canada. Yet the public has been virtually shut out of this legislation, as unfortunately it has been shut out of too much legislation emanating from the Department of the Environment.

As I say, several improvements to the bill were made in the committee, and I think the work done in committee is a demonstration of the good work that committees can do if they are given the time. I want to make particular reference to the excellent contributions in the committee debate made by my colleagues from South Shore (Mr. Crouse), Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro), Kootenay West (Mr. Brisco), Fraser Valley West, Carleton-Charlotte (Mr. McCain), Prince George-Peace River, and St. John's West (Mr. Carter). I think that all of us who sat in the committee will agree that the procedures we have just come through revealed three major difficulties with the committee system, and I want to deal with them briefly at this point.

The first difficulty was that at the outset there was an indication that the government expected the committee stage to be a rubber stamp stage; that it would be short and would yield no changes. After the bill was reported from the standing committee, the parliamentary secretary declared, as he had before, that the standing committee did the job that it was supposed to do and that it took the time it needed to improve the bill. As I say, the government expected the committee to be a rubber stamp; to have a short debate, with no changes emerging. Instead, the committee was active, but it was active against the wishes of the government, at least in my view.

[Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain).]

The second problem—I say this frankly because it also applies to other bills—was that in the debate around the table there were often traces of excessive partisanship. I admit quite frankly that this was the case on both sides. I confess to the House that one of our proposed amendments was not sufficiently thought through and it probably deserved the rejection it received. But I suspect that many other reforms were defeated simply because it was the opposition that proposed them. They were not defeated on their merits but because of their sponsorship. The government was not prepared to consider a good idea because of the source of the idea.

Mr. Malone: So what's new?

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): This has very serious consequences. My colleague from Battle River (Mr. Malone) asks, "What's new?" The point is that we have this kind of thing happening in committee after committee. The government rejects too many good proposals coming from other parts of the House simply because they do come from other parts of the House. Unfortunately, members of the government party abide too slavishly by the wishes of the minister and her officials and subjugate their role as members of parliament to that of supporters of the government.

The third major problem revealed in our consideration of the bill was lack of research staff available to committee and the problems that this can cause when committees are dealing, as ours was, with complex questions of law and international practice. The officials of the department specifically declined my invitation that they assist the opposition in preparing amendments. I understand their declining that invitation, but I would made the point that the minister could have made their expertise available. Instead, we relied on the official opposition research office which, while abundant in talent, is limited in time and was busy with other bills. We relied on such help as we could borrow from interested environmental lawyers. It is a clear deficiency of the system, in dealing with complex matters of this kind, when the official opposition and other critics, including private members on the government side, do not have the access which they should have to the expertise that allows for careful consideration and improvement of government legislation.

In view of these faults that I have mentioned, as well as others that are known to members of the House and which have become clearly evident to members of other committees, I suggest we are not dealing with a satisfactory system in relation to our committees. I notice the presence in the chamber of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) who is one of those responsible for putting together a package on parliamentary reform. I hope that this is one aspect of our present system in parliament that will be reviewed in any serious attempt that is made at parliamentary reform.

● (1220)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this bill is better than when it was introduced. However, it contains several major weaknesses. We have sought to correct some of the more obvious shortcomings in committee. However, gov-